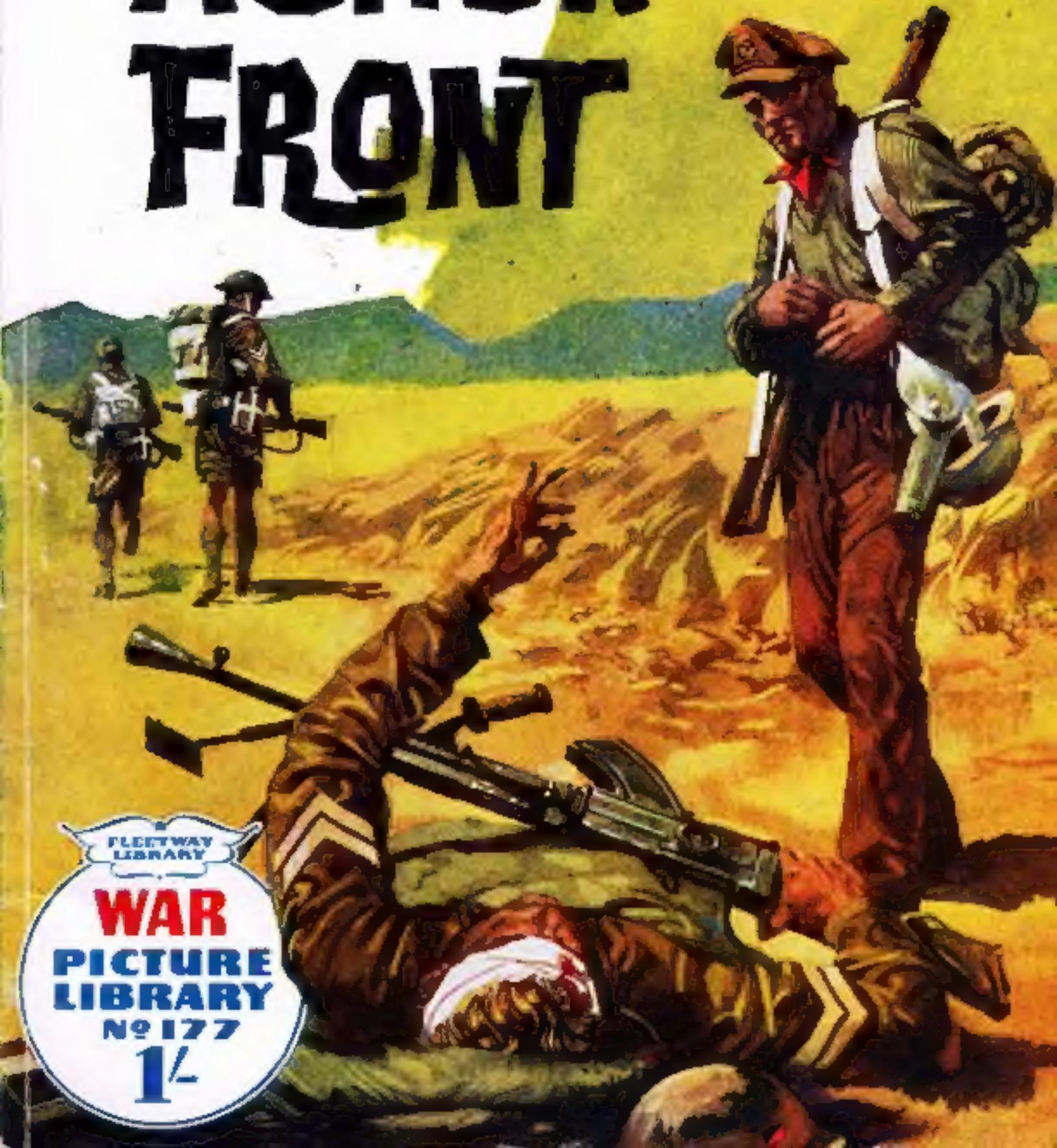


# ACTION FRONT



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## Clear for Action



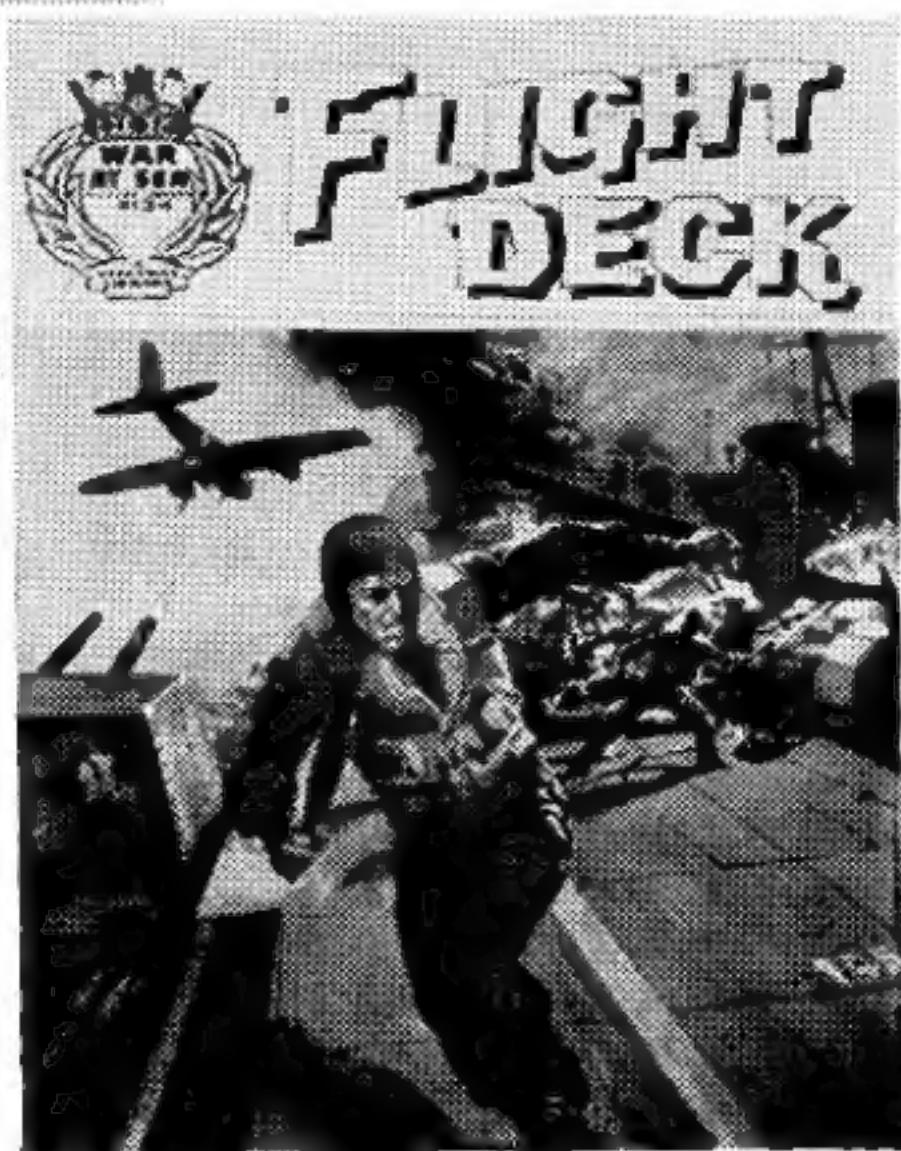
# WAR AT SEA PICTURE LIBRARY

### No. 23.—CLEAR FOR ACTION

On the hell-run to Russia, under constant savage air and sea attack, was no time to learn to take an order—nor to give one.

### No. 24.—FLIGHT DECK

To the carrier's crew, the flight deck was the front line and although their battle would never end, glory passed them by.



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# ACTION FRONT



THE YEAR WAS 1942... THE  
PLACE, THE WESTERN DESERT...  
WHERE THE TIDES OF WAR EBBED  
AND FLOWED WITH UNPREDICTABLE  
RAPIDITY...

# Chapter 1. *Enemy in Sight*

IT WAS ACROSS THAT ARID WILDERNESS OF ROCK AND SAND THAT CORPORAL DAN SHAW AND HIS SECTION WERE FOOTSLOGGING.

NEW TO IT ALL, AND BLOOMING EDGY. BY THE LOOK OF 'EM, JUST MY LUCK TO BE LUMBERED WITH A SHOWER OF REPLACEMENTS.



POINT-SECTION IN THE LEADING PLATOON OF A BATTALION PROBING FOR THE ENEMY. SUCH WAS THE UNENVIABLE ROLE OF CORPORAL DAN SHAW AND HIS SQUAD . . .

DOUBLE OUT INTO OPEN ORDER. AND IF WE'RE SUDDENLY FIRED ON FROM THAT RIDGE AHEAD, I WANT TO SEE YOU DROP FLAT ON YOUR UGLY MUGS.



FIRE ON FROM THE RIDGE? THE WORDS DID  
NOTHING TO EASE THE MEN'S FEARS...

START CRAWLING, MADDOX.  
DON'T SKYLINE YOURSELF, OR  
SOONER OR LATER YOU'LL BE  
FOR IT -- SURE AS FATE!



WHO'D BE A  
PERISHING SCOUT? P  
JOE MUGGINS -- THAT'S  
ME. THE FIRST TO  
COP IT IF WE RUN  
INTO ANY TROUBLE.

# Action Front

THE POINT-SECTION'S SCOUT WAS PRESSED CLOSE TO THE SAND WHEN HE REACHED THE CREST OF THE RIDGE ...



MADDOX CALLED UP DAN AND THE SECTION. THE CORPORAL TOOK ONE LOOK AND DETAILED A RIFLEMAN TO ACT AS RUNNER.

SLIDE BACK FROM THE SKYLINE, MURPHY, THEN GET YOUR SKATES ON AND REPORT TO MISTER HALLAM.



OUT WEST OF THE RIDGE, UNSUSPECTING MEN OF THE GERMAN AFRIKA KORPS WERE ENJOYING A "BREW-UP" ...

A BRIEF HALT TO GULP DOWN THIS ERSATZ COFFEE, HERR HAUPTMANN, THEN WE MOVE NORTH AGAIN.

ACH, SO, HERR MAJOR. IT IS THERE WE SHALL MAKE CONTACT WITH THE BRITISH.



NOT NORTHWARD, BUT DUE EAST, A BRITISH PLATOON WAS EVEN THEN  
TAKING UP A POSITION OF VANTAGE.

TEN PLATOON...  
EIGHT HUNDRED...  
ENEMY  
DETACHMENT...

STONE THE CROWS!  
LIEUTENANT HALLAM'S  
GIVING A FIRE-ORDER,  
AND AT THIS RANGE,  
I'D SAY IT'S MORE LIKE  
FIFTEEN HUNDRED  
YARDS, ANYWAY.



HALLAM WAS AS "NEW TO IT ALL" AS THE MEN IN DAN'S SECTION. SO WAS  
THE PLATOON SERGEANT...



AS DAN SHAW HAD JUDGED, THE DISTANCE WAS NOT ONLY TOO GREAT FOR ACCURACY BUT HAD BEEN INCORRECTLY ESTIMATED. NOT A SHOT REACHED THE GERMANS.

DONNERWETTER!  
WE'RE UNDER FIRE!

BUT NOT EFFECTIVE FIRE! LOOK, IT'S COMING FROM THAT RIDGE! QUICK, GET THAT EIGHTY-EIGHT INTO ACTION!



GERMAN GUNNERS REACTED SWIFTLY TO A HARSH, GUTTURAL COMMAND. AT THE SAME TIME, ON THE RIDGE TO THE EAST, HALLAM ORDERED HIS PLATOON TO RAISE SIGHTS TO MAXIMUM RANGE ...

... AND CONCENTRATE  
ON THE MEN SWARMING  
ROUND THAT GUN!  
MOW THEM DOWN!

MOW 'EM DOWN!  
WHAT A HOPE THE  
LIEUTENANT'S GOT!



THE RATTLE OF SMALL-ARMS CARRIED BACK TO THE MAIN BODY OF THE STRUNG-OUT BRITISH BATTALION. ITS COMMANDING OFFICER CALLED A TEMPORARY HALT...

YOUNG HALLAM'S BUMPED THE ENEMY BY THE SOUND OF IT. I HOPE HE HAS THE SAVVY TO SEND BACK A MESSAGE GIVING US ADEQUATE INFORMATION...

IF YOU LIKE, COLONEL, I'LL PUSH ON AHEAD AND FIND OUT WHAT THE FORM IS.

THE BATTALION COMMANDER ACCEPTED THE OFFER MADE BY A TANK OFFICER ATTACHED TO THE UNIT.

THAT FELLOW SAVILLE'S CO-OPERATIVE, I'LL SAY THAT MUCH FOR HIM. BUT HE'S SO CONFOUNDEDLY SLOPPY AND UNORTHODOX IN HIS BEHAVIOUR AND APPEARANCE. HE WOULDN'T GET AWAY WITH IT IN THIS REGIMENT, BY THUNDER!

## Action Front

6  
LIEUTENANT GUY SAVILLE WAS CERTAINLY UNORTHODOX... JUST ABOUT AS UNORTHODOX AS A TANK OFFICER ACCLIMATISED TO DESERT WARFARE COULD POSSIBLY BE ...

STEP ON IT,  
BUSTER. YOU  
CAN GO FASTER  
THAN THIS.



HIS BRAND OF DISCIPLINE WAS FREE-AND-EASY. HE HAD NICKNAMES FOR HIS CREWMEN. IN DRESS, HIS ONE CONCESSION TO MILITARY DECORUM WAS A WORSE-FOR-WEAR CAP.

THERE THEY ARE NOW, SIR.  
LIEUTENANT HALLAM'S LOT,  
I MEAN... SPREAD OUT ALONG  
THAT RIDGE AWAY AHEAD.

YES, I SEE 'EM.  
OKAY, TAKE THIS  
BATTLE-WAGON RIGHT  
UP UNDER THE CREST,  
BUSTER... BUT NOT  
ON TO IT, MIND YOU...  
NOT TILL WE KNOW  
THE SCORE.



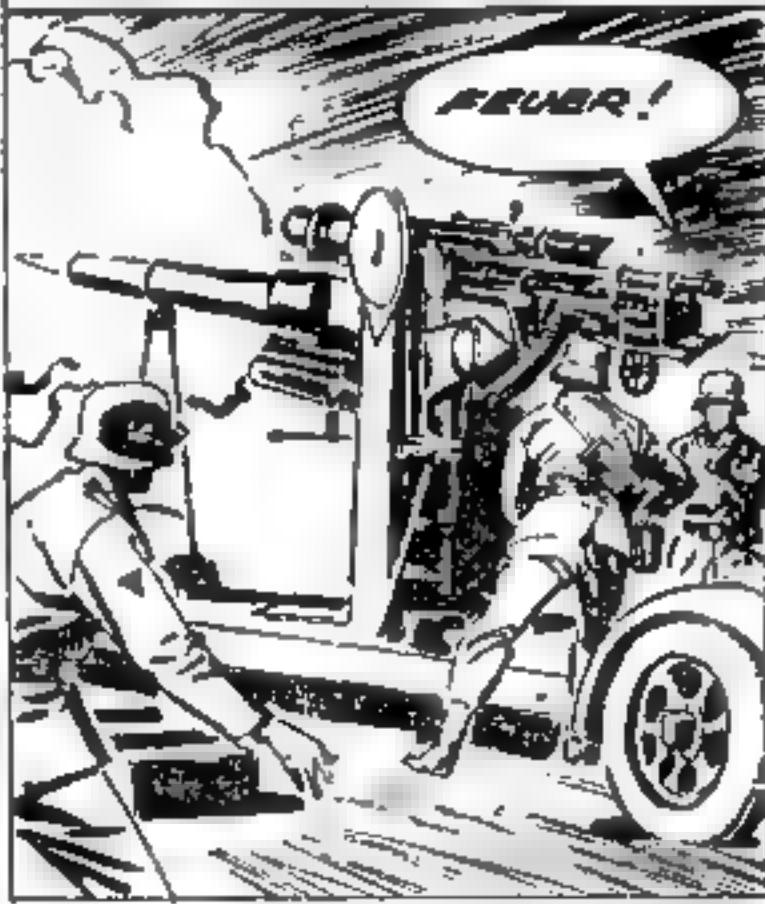
THE HEAVY ROAR OF THE IRONCLAD'S ENGINE CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF HALLAM AND HIS PLATOON ...

HERE'S THE CRUSADER. THAT'S A COMFORT, SIR. SHE'LL BE ABLE TO TACKLE THE JERRY GUN. IT'S JUST ABOUT READY TO LET DRIVE AT US



THE 88 M.M. HAD BEEN UNLIMBERED AND "LAID" IN THE AIM. SECONDS LATER, IT WAS IN BUSINESS!

FEVER!



ASCENDING THE RIDGE'S REVERSE SLOPE, GUY SAVILLE AND HIS THREE-MEN CREW SAW DIRT AND DEBRIS FOUNTAIN HIGH IN A GUSH OF FLAME ...

SHELL-FIRE! I'LL LAY ODDS IT'S FROM AN EIGHTY-EIGHT.

YOU OUGHT TO KNOW, DEAD-SHOT. YOU'VE SEEN AND HEARD ENOUGH EIGHTY-EIGHTS IN YOUR TIME ~ WITHOUT EVER BEING ABLE TO HIT ONE!



THE ECHOING BOOM OF THE EXPLOSION SEEMED TO ROLL DOWN FROM THE CREST TO THEM. DISTANTLY, AN INSTANT LATER, THEY HEARD A SHARP CRACK ...



THE CRUSADER CLANKED TO AN ABRUPT STANDSTILL. A SECOND SHELL SLAMMED INTO THE CREST, SHATTERINGLY...THEN A THIRD ...



LIEUTENANT HALLAM SAW HIS MEN DYING AROUND HIM -- AND GLARED AT THE TANK WHICH HAD GROUNDED TO A HALT IN THE REAR OF THE PLATOON...

WHAT'S THE MATTER  
WITH THAT TANK COMMANDER?  
WHY'S HE STOPPED? HE CAN  
SEE WE'RE TAKING A PASTING!  
HEY, SAVILLE, GET UP  
HERE!



THE CRUSADER DID NOT MOVE...

MISTER BLINKING  
SAVILLE AIN'T  
BUDGING. HE AND  
THE JOKERS WITH  
HIM AIN'T STICKING  
OUT ~~THEIR~~ NECKS.

HALLAM HEARD DAN SHAW'S SARDONIC COMMENT, AND HIS HACKLES ROSE IN WHAT HE RECKONED WAS RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION...

NOT BUDGING, EH,  
CORPORAL? WE'LL  
SEE ABOUT  
THAT!



## Action Front

THE INFANTRY LIEUTENANT STRODE PURPOSEFULLY DOWN THE SLOPE. THERE WAS A GLINT IN HIS EYE ...

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE PLAYING AT? YOU CAN SEE WE'RE IN TROUBLE, CAN'T YOU? GET UP THERE AND SILENCE THAT JERRY GUN FOR US!

DON'T BE A CLOT!



WHAT DID YOU SAY?

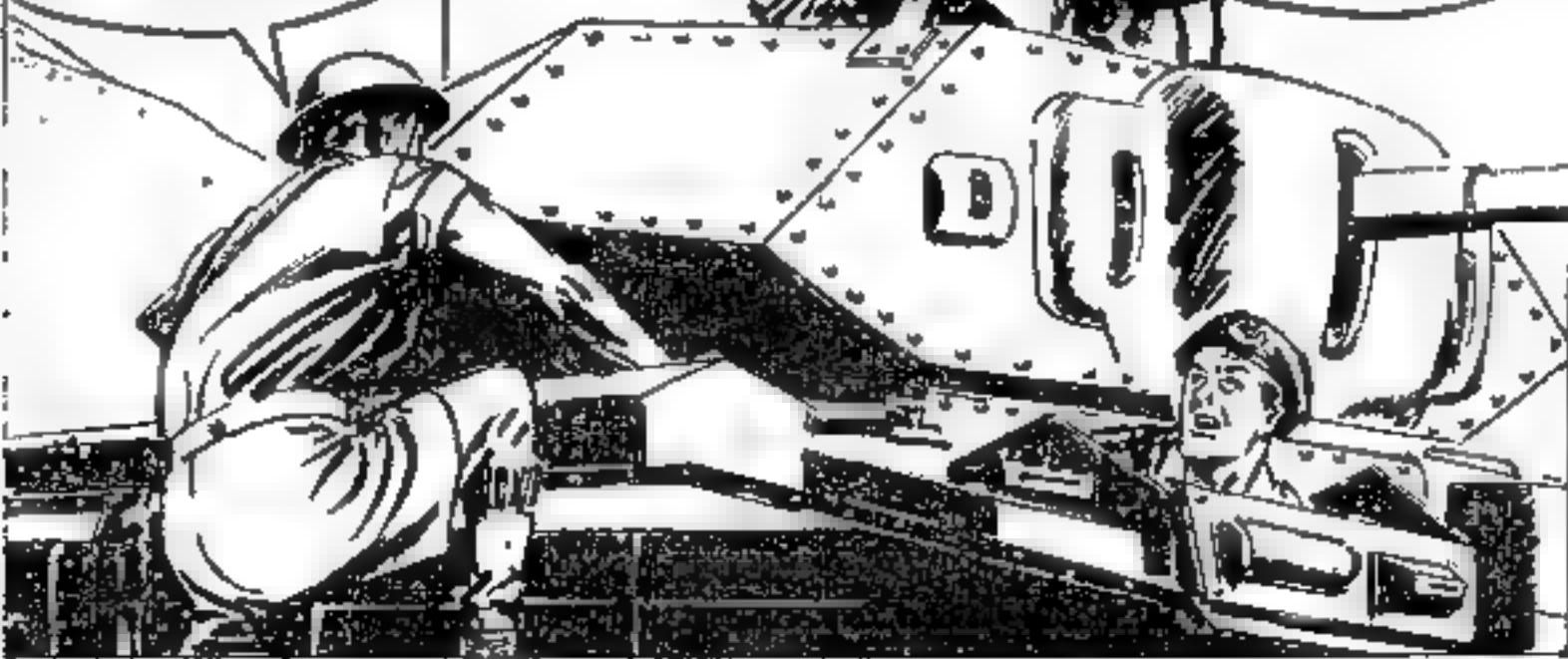
YOU HEARD! IF YOU IMAGINE WE'RE TRUNDLING UP TO THE CREST ON YOUR SAY-SO, THEN YOU NEED YOUR HEAD EXAMINED.



A FURIOUS ARGUMENT DEVELOPED. HALLAM FAIRLY BLAZED. HOT-TEMPERED AND IMPETUOUS BY NATURE, HE SHOUTED ACCUSATIONS OF COWARDICE ... DERELICTION OF DUTY ...

...YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE IN CHARGE OF AN ARMOURED FIGHTING VEHICLE. AREN'T YOU? ALL RIGHT, LET'S SEE YOU AND YOUR CREW DO SOME FIGHTING IN IT!

AND LET'S SEE YOU SHOW SOME SENSE. PULL YOUR MEN BACK FROM THAT RIDGE. YOU'VE MADE 'AUNT SALLIES' OF THEM, BUT YOU'RE NOT DOING THE SAME WITH US!



SAVILLE ATTEMPTED TO CUT SHORT THE ALTERCATION BY CALLING TO HIS DRIVER ...

WE'RE WASTING TIME, BUSTER, TURN THE BATTLE-WAGON RIGHT-ABOUT!

NO, BY GOLLY, YOU'RE NOT RUNNING OUT ON US!



THE TANK COMMANDER THRUST AT HALLAM IMPATIENTLY, IN AN EFFORT TO DISLODGE HIM. THE INFANTRY SUBALTERN LOST HIS TEMPER ... AND SWUNG HIS REVOLVER ...



A GALAXY OF STARS SEEMED TO EXPLODE IN FRONT OF SAVILLE'S EYES AS THE BUTT OF A THIRTY-EIGHT THUMPED INTO HIS TEMPLE. HE BUCKLED AT THE KNEES ...



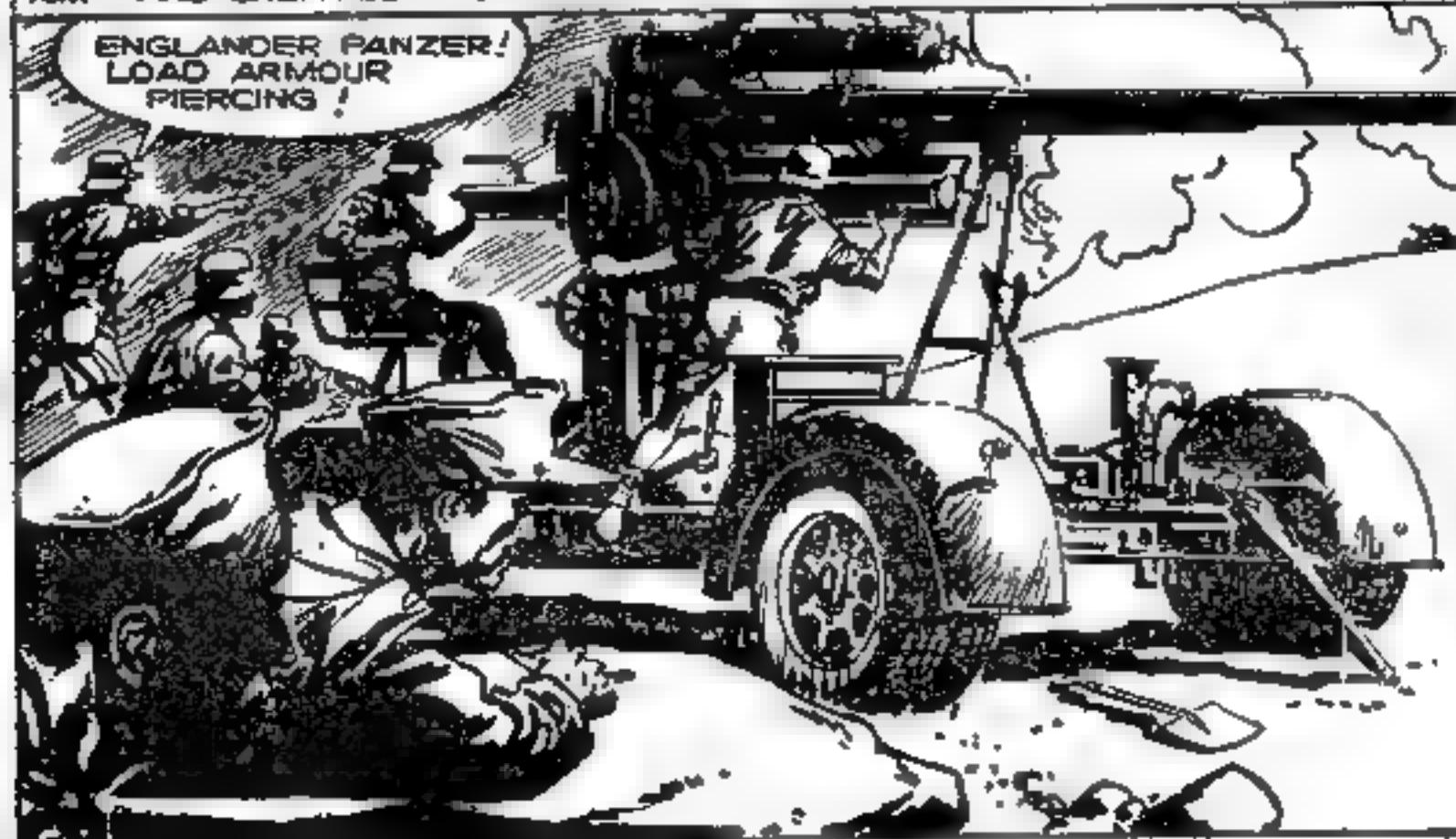
THE DRIVER HESITATED. THE RATE INFANTRY OFFICER PROMPTLY SCREAMED ABUSE AND THREATS. GULPING, BUSTER ENGAGED THE GEAR-LEVER ...

IT'S UP TO YOU TO TAKE THE HEAT OFF THE INFANTRY !  
THAT'S THE JOB OF ALL SUPPORTING-ARMS, THOUGH YOUR CONFOUNDED LIEUTENANT DOESN'T SEEM TO KNOW IT !



THE CRUSADER ROLLED UP TO THE CREST, IT POKED ITS NOSE OVER THE RIM -- AND CREATED A STIR AMONG THE GERMAN 88'S GUN-NUMBERS ...

ENGLANDER PANZER !  
LOAD ARMOUR PIERCING !

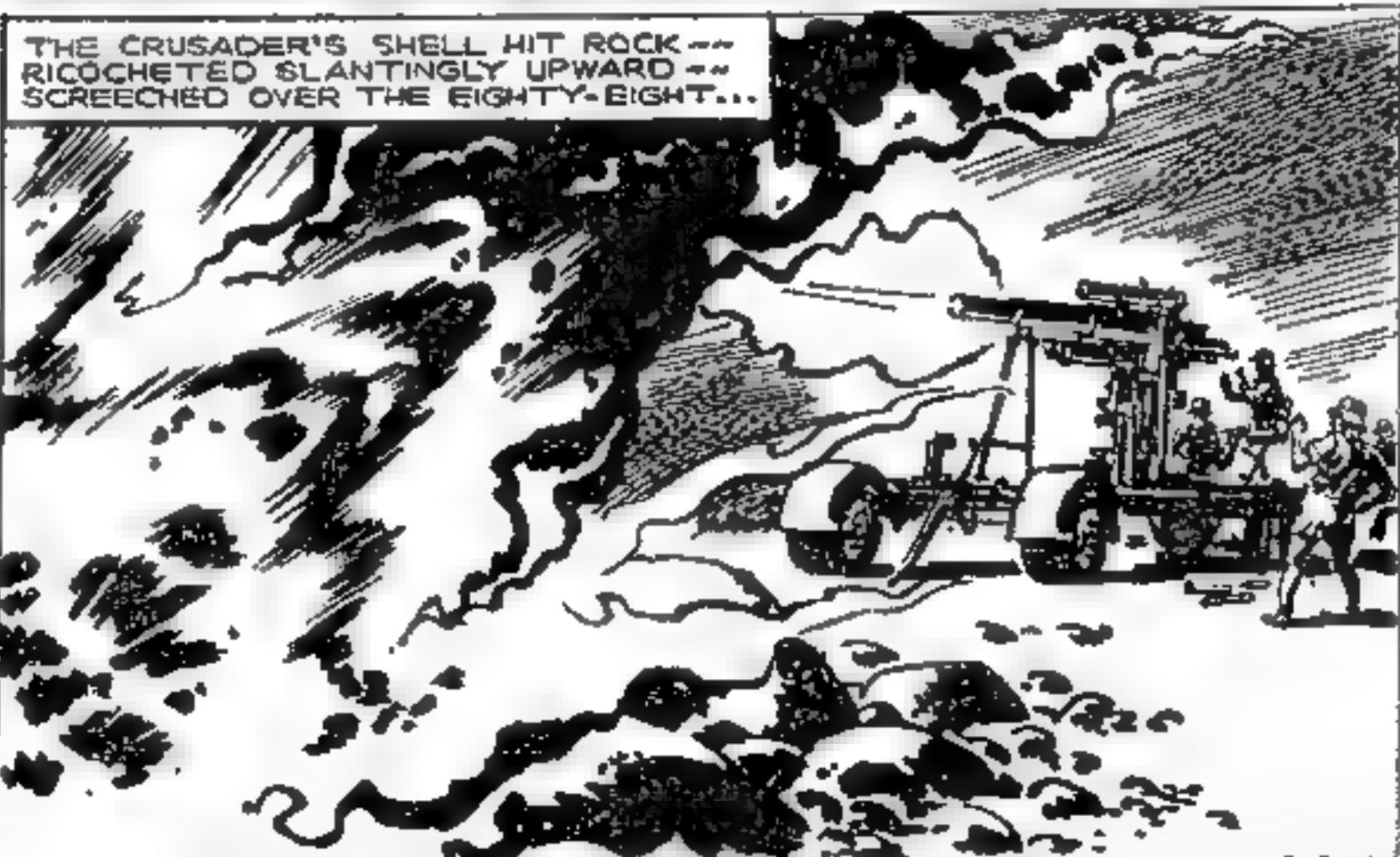


AN A.P. SHOT WAS WHIPPED INTO THE BREECH -- JUST AS A LITTLE 2-POUNDER SPAT OUT A CHALLENGE FROM THE RIDGE TO THE EAST...

LASHING OUT AT AN EIGHTY-EIGHT WITH THIS TOY CANNON IS LIKE A PUP YAPPING AT A FULL-GROWN MASTIFF!



THE CRUSADER'S SHELL HIT ROCK --  
RICOCHETED SLANTINGLY UPWARD --  
SCREECHED OVER THE EIGHTY-EIGHT...



A NEAR MISS!  
THAT COULD BE DUGGAN'S  
FIRST AND LAST CRACK  
AT THE JERRY GUN.

A SPLIT SECOND LATER, 19 TONS OF  
IRONCLAD ROCKED TO THE  
BLUDGEONING IMPACT OF THE NAZI  
WEAPON'S POWER-PACKED REPLY!

AAARGH!

MISTER  
HALLAM!

JAGGED SPLINTERS OF STEEL LASHED AROUND THE TANK'S INTERIOR.  
MIRACULOUSLY, THREE OF THE CREW ESCAPED WITHOUT A SCRATCH...

...BUSTER FLEMING, DRIVER...  
DUGGAN, THE GUNNER... AND  
GUY SAVILLE, COMMANDER...

## Chapter 2. Cut Off

LIEUTENANT SAVILLE COLLECTED HIS WITS TO FIND DUGGAN AND BUSTER FLEMING BENDING OVER HIM . . .

W-WHAT HAPPENED?



HIS TANK HAD BEEN DAMAGED -- HIS RADIO-OPERATOR KILLED. HE LEARNED, TOO, THAT HALLAM WAS DEAD. THEN CAME A SHOUT . . .

THE JERRIES ARE COMING AT US! THERE'S A HECK OF A LOT MORE OF 'EM THAN WE THOUGHT!



NAZI INFANTRYMEN WERE ADVANCING IN EXTENDED LINE. OTHERS WERE SWARMING FROM A WADI BEHIND THE 88 M.M. GUN WHICH WAS FIRING HIGH-EXPLOSIVE AGAIN ...

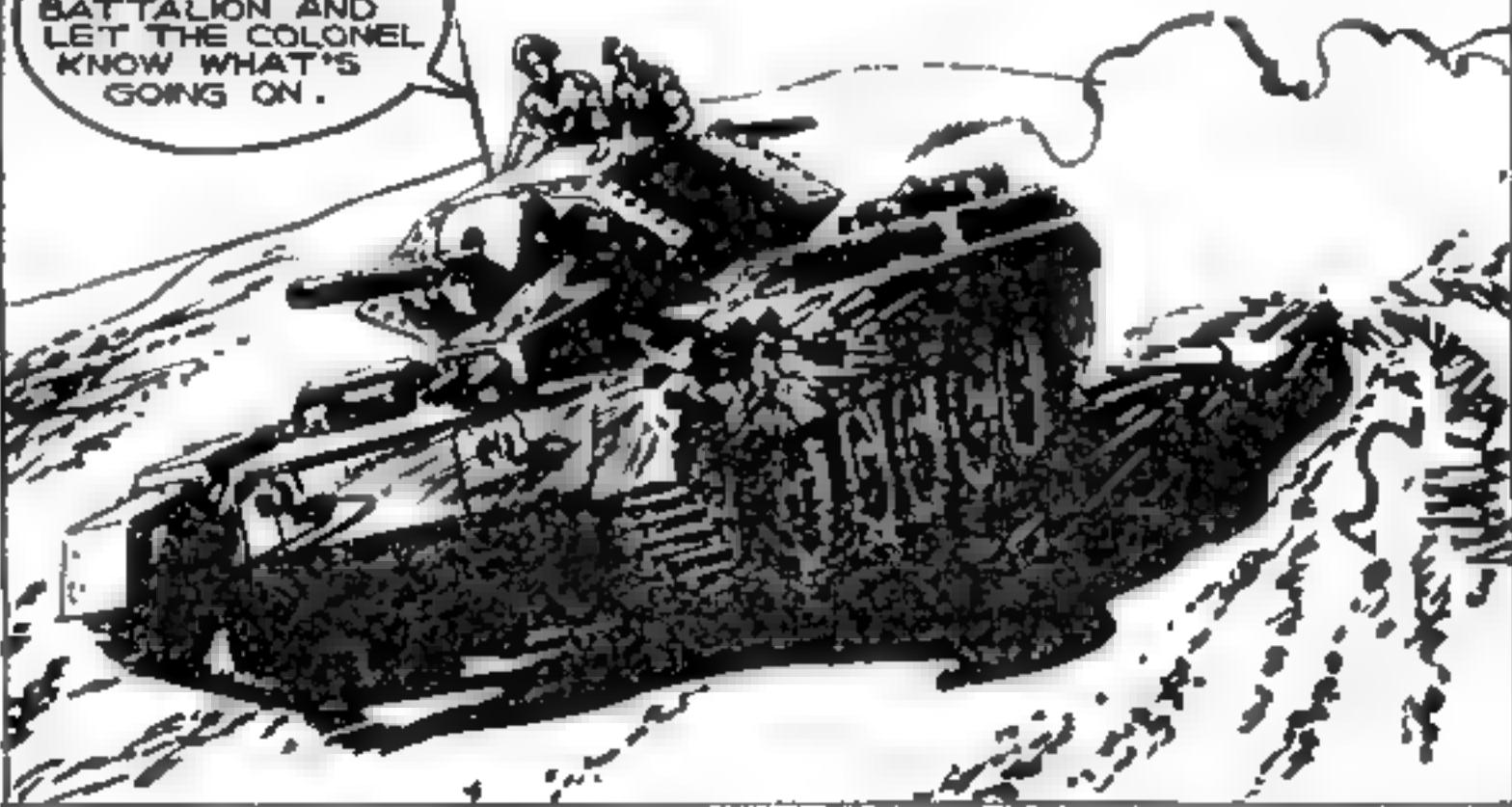


GUY SAVILLE SAT UP AND TOOK NOTICE ... AND MADE A SNAP DECISION ...



THE CRUSADER'S ENGINE STARTED RELUCTANTLY AND BUSTER TURNED HER DOWN THE REVERSE SLOPE, GRINDINGLY . . .

WE'LL MAKE A  
BEELINE FOR THE  
BATTALION AND  
LET THE COLONEL  
KNOW WHAT'S  
GOING ON .



TO REPORT THE SITUATION -- THAT WAS GUY'S PURPOSE. BUT THE INFANTRYMEN ON THE RIDGE DREW THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS . . .

THERE GO OUR TRUE-BLUE  
TANK PALS -- LEAVING US IN  
THE LURCH ! TO BLAZES  
WITH 'EM ! WE'LL MANAGE  
WITHOUT 'EM !



THE REMNANTS OF HALLAM'S PLATOON FACED THEIR FRONT GRIMLY. THOUGH MANY OF THEM WERE IN ACTION FOR THE FIRST TIME, THEY NERVED THEMSELVES TO HOLD FIRM ...



THE ONCOMING NAZIS WERE EASIER TARGETS NOW, BUT MORE AND MORE OF THEM WERE MUSTERING IN RESERVE, WHERE THAT 88 M.M. GUN WAS PUMPING OUT SHELLS ...



THE SURVIVORS OF DAN SHAW'S SECTION WERE DETAILED TO PULL OUT FIRST. THEY WERE WITHDRAWING DOWN THE RIDGE WHEN THEY SAW GUY SAVILLE'S CRUSADER BEGIN TO JERK CONVULSIVELY ...



THEY REACHED LEVEL GROUND. THERE, DAN ORDERED HIS SQUAD TO TAKE UP TEMPORARY POSITIONS ...



BUT AS THE SERGEANT AND THE REST OF THE PLATOON STARTED THE DESCENT, THEY WERE CAUGHT IN ENFILED!



MAUSER RIFLES AND SCHMEISSER MACHINE-PISTOLS WHIP-LASHED THE RETREATING BRITISH INFANTRYMEN WITH A TEMPEST OF METAL . . .



## Action front

DAN SHAW AND HIS MEN OPENED UP ON THE NAZIS WHO HAD OUTFLANKED THEIR COMRADES ...

LET 'EM HAVE IT, MATES!



THE GERMANS WHO HAD SKIRTED THE RIDGE WERE THEMSELVES RAKED BY AN ENFILOADING FIRE ~ AND WERE STOPPED COLD!

TAKE COVER!



DAN'S SECTION CONTINUED TO BLAST AT THAT GROUP OF NAZIS. EVEN SO, THE BULK OF THE BRITISH PLATOON WERE LEFT LYING ON THAT SANDY SLOPE.



THE CORPORAL MADE A SWIFT SURVEY OF THE SURROUNDING TERRAIN.

WE WON'T GET  
BACK TO BATTALION...  
NOT STRAIGHT BACK,  
ANYWAY! OUR BEST  
BET'S THE ROCKY  
STRIP TO THE SOUTH-  
EAST THERE. GO  
FLAT OUT FOR IT!



## Action Front

DUGGAN AND BUSTER FLEMING LOOKED TO LIEUTENANT GUY SAVILLS FOR A LEAD. THE TANK OFFICER NODDED, ACKNOWLEDGING THE SOUNDNESS OF THE INFANTRY N.C.O.'S REASONING ...



A HUNDRED YARDS LAY BETWEEN THEM AND THE NEAREST COVER -- THE LONGEST HUNDRED YARDS ANY OF THEM HAD EVER KNOWN ...



ONLY SEVEN OF THEM MANAGED TO ESCAPE THE NAZI BULLETS.



GUY SAVILLE HAZARDED A GUESS AT THE ENEMY'S INTENTIONS...



SOON, THEY HEARD THE RATTLE OF SMALL-ARMS' FIRE TO THE EAST... AND SAW WAVE UPON WAVE OF NAZIS ADVANCING ...



HALLAM HAD BLUNDERED, SURE - THERE WAS NO DENYING IT. YET IT WAS GALLING TO HEAR A TANKMAN SAY SO ...

ALL RIGHT, OUR PLATOON-COMMANDER SLIPPED UP! HE WAS NEW TO THE DESERT - DIDN'T KNOW HOW IT CAN MISLEAD YOU WHEN YOU'RE NOT USED TO IT. HE WAS NEW TO ACTION, TOO...

HE SHOULD NEVER HAVE BLNGED US INTO A FIRE-FIGHT WITHOUT SIZING UP THE OPPPOSITION. ALL THE SAME, IF HE'D HAD THE BACKING OF A TANK-CREW WITH A SPARK OF GLTS BETWEEN 'EM ...

WHAT'S THAT? WHY YOU ...



GUY SAVILLE'S VOICE RAPPED IN SHARPLY...

THAT'S ENOUGH! NEVER MIND THE INQUEST ON WHAT WENT WRONG AND WHOSE FAULT IT WAS / THERE'S A BIG ENOUGH BATTLE BUILDING UP WITHOUT YOU TWO STARTING A PRIVATE WAR !



NAZI MORTARS OF HEAVY CALIBRE WERE NOW IN ACTION. SALVOES OF BOMBS WERE LOBBED FROM THEM TO BURST DEVASTATINGLY FOUR THOUSAND YARDS AWAY ...



SAVILLE LISTENED WITH INCREASING ANXIETY TO THE SOUNDS OF THE ENGAGEMENT ...

FROM WHAT WE'VE SEEN,  
JERRY'S GOT WEIGHT OF  
NUMBERS *AND* SUPERIOR  
HITTING-POWER IN THEIR  
SUPPORT-WEAPONS.



GRADUALLY THE TUMULT DWINDED...AND THAT WAS A BAD SIGN...

OUR CHAPS MUST  
BE RETREATING!  
THE SHOOTING'S  
GETTING FARTHER  
AWAY...



AS THE AFRIKA KORPS MORTARMEN RODE OFF IN HALF-TRACKS TO TAKE UP FRESH POSITIONS EASTWARD, DAN LOOKED AT SAVILLE ...

NOW WHAT?

WE START WALKING, CORPORAL. BUT NOT IN THE DIRECTION THE GERMANS HAVE TAKEN. WE'LL STRIKE SOUTH, THEN SWING EAST WHEN I CONSIDER IT'S SAFE.



THE R.A.C. SUBALTERN TURNED TO LEAD THE WAY. DAN CHECKED HIM ...

HANG ON A MINUTE, MISTER SAVILLE.

WE MIGHT BE IN FOR A LONGER TREK THAN WE BARGAIN FOR. WE DON'T WANT TO BE 'CAUGHT-OUT', LIKE ...



THE IRONY IN THE INFANTRY SECTION - LEADER'S VOICE NEEDLED GUY SAVILLE, BUT BEFORE HE COULD SPEAK, DAN HAD WHEELED ...

THIS WAY, YOU BLOKES. WE'RE TAKING WHAT WE CAN CARRY IN THE WAY OF EXTRA AMMO AND SPARE RATIONS.



THE TANK OFFICER FELT BOUND TO ADMIT THE SENSE OF THE CORPORAL'S ORDER AS HE WATCHED THE FOUR INFANTRYMEN MOVE OUT OF THE ROCKS.

WE'D BETTER FOLLOW THEIR EXAMPLE.



WHEN THE LITTLE PARTY LEFT THAT AREA OF DEATH AND DESOLATION EVERY MAN OF THEM WAS LOADED WITH ADDITIONAL GEAR AND SUPPLIES. SAVILLE WAS NO EXCEPTION.

WE'RE A SAD-LOOKING BUNCH -- AND NO MISTAKE. WE LOST 'SPARKS' FROM OUR CREW, AND WE'RE GOING TO MISS HIM BADLY -- BUT THOSE FELLOWS ARE ALL THAT'S LEFT OF A PLATOON MORE THAN THIRTY-STRONG.



THEY HAD GRAVITATED INTO TWO GROUPS, AS THOUGH BY SECOND NATURE. THEY STAYED LIKE THAT.

THE WAY THOSE COVES ARE ACTING, YOU'D THINK WE'RE TO BLAME FOR ALL THEIR MATES BEING WIPED OUT.



A MEASURABLE DISTANCE SEPARATED THEM, PHYSICALLY, BUT THE GULF WHICH KEPT THEM APART IN MOOD AND OUTLOOK WAS NOT TO BE GAUGED BY ANY YARDSTICK.

# Chapter 3. Spotter Plane

IT WAS THE TAIL-END OF THE SEASON OF THE KHAMISIN, THE HOT WIND THAT SWEEPS THE DESERT DURING MARCH AND APRIL... AND SOON A DUST-STORM DEVELOPED...



GUY HAD NOT KNOWN SHAW POSSESSED A COMPASS. HE EASED OVER UNTIL HE WAS ALONGSIDE THE N.C.O. ....



DAN'S TONE WAS BORDERING ON THE AGGRESSIVE. GUY SAVILLE "FLEW OFF THE HANDLE" AND SNAPPED AT HIM ...



THE LIEUTENANT POINTED TO THE  
BARREL OF THE NON-COM'S TOMMY-GUN ...



A SOMEWHAT CRESTFALLEN N.C.O. SURRENDERED THE INSTRUMENT AND  
SAW THE OFFICER PROVE HIS POINT...



THAT NIGHT, THEY RESTED IN A WADI. BY MORNING, THE KHAMSIN HAD BLOWN ITSELF OUT...

IF WE STRIKE NORTH-NORTH EAST WE SHOULD EVENTUALLY PICK UP THE ROAD THAT RUNS ACROSS THE SALT-MARSHES CLEAR TO THE EGYPTIAN BORDER



THEY RESUMED THEIR MARCH, QUITTING THE DRY RIVER-BED. TOWARDS NOON, THEY WERE TRUDGING OVER STONY LEVELS WHEN THEY HEARD A DISTANT THRUMMING ...



SAVILLE HAD NO TALENT FOR AIRCRAFT-RECOGNITION, BUT THE INFANTRY N.C.O. HAD !



GUY BARKED AN ORDER... ONE THAT WAS PROMPTLY COUNTERMANDED !



DAN'S VOICE COULD BLARE LIKE A BUGLE -- AND UNDER ITS IMPACT, NO-ONE  
PAID HEED TO GUY SAVILLE'S ... NOT EVEN DUGGAN AND BUSTER  
FLEMING ...



THE ENEMY PLANE WAS EATING UP THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THEM, ITS  
ENGINE-NOTE SWELLING TO A THUNDEROUS ROAR...



IT WAS A MESSERSCHMITT 109. ALL AT ONCE THE SAVAGE CLATTER OF ITS GUNS PUNCTUATED THE CRESCENDO OF ITS POWERFUL MOTOR...



A BLIZZARD OF BULLETS CHEWED UP THE GROUND ALL ROUND GUY SAVILLE. HE TOOK OFF AS IF HE HAD BEEN CATAPOULTED!



HE LANDED IN A HEAP, HIS HEART GOING LIKE A TRIP-HAMMER. SOMEHOW, THAT HAIL OF BULLETS HAD MISSED HIM.



RAPID FIRE!



THE ENEMY PLANE SLAMMED OVERHEAD THROUGH AN INEFFECTUAL SPATTER OF SHOTS. IT CIRCLED TO MAKE ANOTHER PASS...



TALK ABOUT  
BLIND LUCK! NOT  
A SCRATCH ON ME!  
HERE COMES THAT  
CONFOUNDED NAZI  
KITE AGAIN!



## Action Front

THE 109 FLAYED ANEW AT THE SCATTERED BRITONS. TRACER THRASHED INTO THE GANO - FRIGHTENINGLY CLOSE TO TWO OF THEM ...



THEN SUDDENLY THE STRAFING ENDED. THE GERMAN CLEPED OFF. SEVEN FIGURES ROSE TO THEIR FEET AND MARVELLED THAT THEY WERE ALL INTACT ...

WHAT MADE HIM LET UP ON US? DO YOU SUPPOSE OUR SHOOTING WAS TOO GOOD FOR HIM?

I DOUBT IT. MAYBE HE DIDN'T HAVE TOO MUCH AMMO, AND WANTED TO KEEP SOME IN RESERVE IN CASE HE TANGLED WITH A SPIT OR A HURRI ON HIS WAY HOME.



THE MESSERSCHMITT DISAPPEARED. GUY SAVILLE AND DAN SHAW GLANCED AT EACH OTHER, BUT DID NOT SPEAK...

THIS YOUNG SQUIRT OF AN N.C.O. ACTS AS IF HE WAS IN COMMAND. STILL, HE SEEMS TO KNOW THE ROPES IN THIS BRAND OF WAR-- I DON'T!

HE MAY BE AN OFFICER, BUT HE DON'T SEEM TO HAVE A CLUE...OUTSIDE OF READING A MAP AND A COMPASS.



THE DESERT CASTAWAYS MOVED ON AND, AN HOUR LATER, SIGHTED THE ROAD. AN EXTENSIVE SALT-MARSH LAY BETWEEN THEM AND THE ROAD ...

IMPOSSIBLE GROUND FOR TANKS, THIS --OR FOR TRANSPORT OF ANY DESCRIPTION. BUT IT'LL HOLD UP UNDER OUR WEIGHT ALL RIGHT...



DAN POINTED NORTH-WESTWARD. DUST WAS TRAILING FROM A D.P. IN THE DESERT HIGHWAY...

A VEHICLE OF SOME SORT, BUT WE'VE NO MEANS OF TELLING YET WHETHER IT'S BRITISH OR GERMAN OR EYTYIE.



WE'D BETTER PLAY IT SAFE AND LIE LOW.

# Action Front

THEY FLOPPED DOWN TO WATCH AND WAIT. A TRUCK FINALLY BOWLED INTO VIEW. IT WAS GERMAN AND BORE THE AFRIKA KORPS' INSIGNIA ...

IT'S SLOWING DOWN. IT LOOKS AS IF THE DRIVER'S GOING TO PULL UP.

IT DOES AND ALL. PERHAPS THEY SPOTTED US.



ARE THEY THE PARTY OF ENGLANDERS MENTIONED IN THE RADIO-MESSAGE FROM THE RECONNAISSANCE 'PLANE, FELDWEBEL?

THEY ARE SO FAR OFF I CANNOT BE SURE THEY MAY BE DEAD MEN, KILLED IN SOME SKIRMISH. WE HAD BETTER MAKE A CHECK, THOUGH.



THE GERMAN LORRY DISGORGED ITS OCCUPANTS --FIFTEEN STRONG. THEY SHOOK OUT INTO OPEN ORDER AND STARTED ACROSS THE SALT-MARSH... WARILY... OMINOUSLY...



IN THE MINDS OF THE BRITONS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MARSH, THERE WAS NO DOUBT NOW AS TO THE NAZIS' INTENTIONS ...

THEY MUST HAVE BEEN TIPPED OFF ABOUT US. WE'LL LET 'EM GET AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE BEFORE WE OPEN FIRE, CORPORAL SHAW. I'M NOT SO HOT WITH A RIFLE, AND NEITHER ARE MY TWO LADS.



THE GERMANS APPROACHED WITHIN TWO-HUNDRED YARDS. THEY WERE TENSED UP, UNEASY, ESPECIALLY ONE OF THEM, THE TRUCK-DRIVER ...

LET'S MAKE SURE NOW, FELDWEBEL!



HE SNAPPED OFF A SHOT. IT SQURTED SAND INTO JESMOND'S FACE...AND SPARKED OFF A RAGGED VOLLEY FROM LEE-ENFIELDS, BREN AND TOMMY-GUN ...

MADDOX. THERE'S ONE WITH A PAIR OF FIELD-GLASSES SLUNG FROM HIS NECK! CUT HIM DOWN!

HE KNOWS HIS JOB, THIS CORPORAL...



MADDOX SHIFTED HIS AIM AS HE SINGLED OUT THE MAN WITH THE BINOCULARS. THE LIGHT MACHINE-GUN STITCHED THE AIR WITH A BRIEF, STAMMERING BURST ...



IF THE FELDWEBEL HAD LIVED, HE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE SENT HIS MEN TO GROUND AND UTILISED THEIR FIRE-POWER TO THE FULL. AS IT WAS, THEY SQUANDERED THEIR ADVANTAGE...



BEFORE THEY HAD COVERED ANOTHER HUNDRED YARDS THEY HAD BEEN WHITLED DOWN DRASITICALLY ...



# Action Front

NOW ONLY EQUAL IN NUMBERS TO THE OPPPOSITION, THE NAZIS TURNED TAIL AND RACED ACROSS THE SALT-MARSH ...



THE PURSUERS GAINED ON THE FLEEING GERMANS. BUT, A LITTLE WAY FROM THE LORRY, THE HINDMOST OF THE FUGITIVES SPUN ROUND IN DESPERATION ...



MADDOX BLASTED FROM THE HIP. HIS BULLETS THUDDED HOME... TOO LATE TO PREVENT THE ARCHING FLIGHT OF A STICK-GRENADE, THOUGH...



MADDOX FELL DEAD. JESMOND KEELED OVER. SAVILLE AND THE OTHERS KEPT GOING AS THE REMAINING GERMANS BELTED ON TO THE ROAD...



SAVILLE CALLED A HALT WHEN THEY REACHED THE LORRY. HE WAS NO LONGER INTERESTED IN PURSUING THE NAZIS ...

NEVER MIND 'EM.  
WE'VE GOT WHAT  
WE WANT, ANYHOW.  
WE ----



HIS VOICE TAILED OFF. HE SWALLOWED AT SIGHT OF A HUMAN HAND THAT WAS CLAWING AT THE AIR ...

WHAT THE DEVIL?



# Chapter 4. Panzer Column

RECOVERING HIMSELF AS MURPHY SPOKE, GUY SAVILLE UNFASTENED THE TAILBOARD AND TOOK A LOOK IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK ...



HE CLIMBED INTO THE LORRY AND KNELT  
BESIDE THE MAN LYING THERE ...

I'M --- DONE FOR...  
I WAS IN CHARGE OF  
A REAR-PARTY...  
DETAILED TO MINE A  
STRETCH OF ROAD TO  
DENY IT TO A GERMAN  
ARMoured GROUP. IT'S  
DUE ABOUT SIXTEEN  
HUNDRED HOURS... BUT  
WE WERE JUMPED BY  
THIS LONG-RANGE  
MOTORISED PATROL.



THE WOUNDED CAPTAIN DIED WITHIN A FEW MINUTES, BUT NOT BEFORE HE HAD GIVEN THE FULL DETAILS OF HIS TASK.



I'VE HEARD ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT IF THIS ROAD STAYS OPEN, A RIGHT-HOOK BY ROMMEL'S PANZERS COULD BE CATASTROPHIC. WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

THE DEAD OFFICER WAS LIFTED OUT. HIS SLEEPING-BAG WAS UTILISED FOR JESMOND DAN RETRIEVED THE BREM FROM BESIDE MADDOX'S BODY AND HANDED DUGGAN HIS TOMMY-GUN ...



DAN, MURPHY AND DUGGAN CLIMBED IN BESIDE JESMOND. GUY BAVILLE AND BUSTER FLEMING SHARED THE CAB ...



RIGHT, BUSTER  
TURN THIS TRUCK  
ROUND TILL WE'RE  
FACING WEST, THEN  
KEEP GOING TILL  
I TELL YOU TO  
STOP.

OR UNTIL  
WE RUN  
SMACK INTO  
THAT JERRY  
ARMOURED  
COLUMN,  
SIR!

THEY MET NO ARMoured-COLUMN. THE ONLY TANK THEY SAW WAS  
BRITISH AND DEREJCT. WHERE IT STOOD, THERE WERE SALT-MARSHES  
ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ROAD ...



PULL UP, BUSTER.  
I DON'T THINK WE  
NEED TRAVEL ANY  
FARTHER. THIS AREA  
LOOKS AS SUITABLE  
FOR OUR PURPOSE  
AS THE ONE THE  
CAPTAIN DESCRIBED.

THE MINES INTENDED FOR THE BLOCKING OF THE ROUTE HAD BEEN GATHERED BY THE GERMANS AND DUMPED IN THEIR TRUCK. GUY DIRECTED THAT THEY SHOULD BE UNLOADED...

WE'LL PLANT THEM SO AS TO WRECK A STRETCH OF THE ROAD. WE'VE GOT TO BLOW A BREACH IN THIS CAUSEWAY ACROSS THE MARSHES, CUTTING IT COMPLETELY.

MISTER SAVILLE -- I --- I WISH I COULD DO SOMETHING TO HELP.



THE SUBALTERN LOOKED AT JESMOND THOUGHTFULLY ...

YOU KNOW, THERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO. THOSE JERRIES WHO SKEDADDLED MIGHT DRIFT THIS WAY AND PLUCK UP THE NERVE TO ATTACK US FROM THE REAR WHILE WE'RE BUSY LAYING THE MINES. YOU COULD COVER US.



UNDER GUY'S DIRECTION, DAN AND MURPHY INTERRUPTED THEIR LABOURS TO LIFT JESMOND FROM THE TRUCK.



THE WOUNDED INFANTRYMAN WAS SET DOWN IN A POSITION WITH A BROAD VIEW OF THE EAST...

IF YOU ROLL ON TO YOUR CHEST, MATE, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO SPOT THOSE JERRIES A LONG WAY OFF -- IF THEY COME THAT WAY.



GUY JOINED THE TRIO. HE GAVE JESMOND THE BREN INSTEAD OF THE RIFLE...



AS DAN AND MURPHY MADE THEIR WAY BACK TOWARDS THE TRUCK, THE LIEUTENANT LINGERED WITH JESMOND...



MEANWHILE, BUSTER, DUGGAN, MURPHY AND DAN SHAW  
WERE INSPECTING THE DERELICT TANK ...



ASIDE FROM ITS BUSTED TRACKS, THERE DON'T SEEM TO BE MUCH WRONG WITH THIS BATTLE-WAGON. THE GUNS ARE OKAY--EVEN THE WIRELESS HAS GOT A HEALTHY CRACKLE --

BREAK IT UP, YOU BLOKES. WE'VE WORK TO DO.



BUT AT THAT MOMENT, GUY SAVILLE HEARD A DISTANT GROWLING NOISE ...



THERE WAS CLEARLY NO TIME TO LAY THE MINES. IT SEEMED ALL THAT COULD BE DONE WAS TO DECAMP...UNLESS...GUY HAD AN IDEA...



HE CLIMBED INTO THE TANK,  
FOLLOWED BY BUSTER FLEMING AND  
DUGGAN. DAN AND MURPHY HOVERED  
ALONGSIDE, UNCERTAINLY...

BUZZ OFF, YOU  
TWO! THAT'S AN  
ORDER!



BUNG AN A.R. SHELL IN  
THE BREECH, BUSTER ...  
DUGGAN, BE READY TO FIRE  
ON YOUR OWN INITIATIVE!  
MEANTIME, I'LL GET BUSY  
WITH THIS RADIO ...



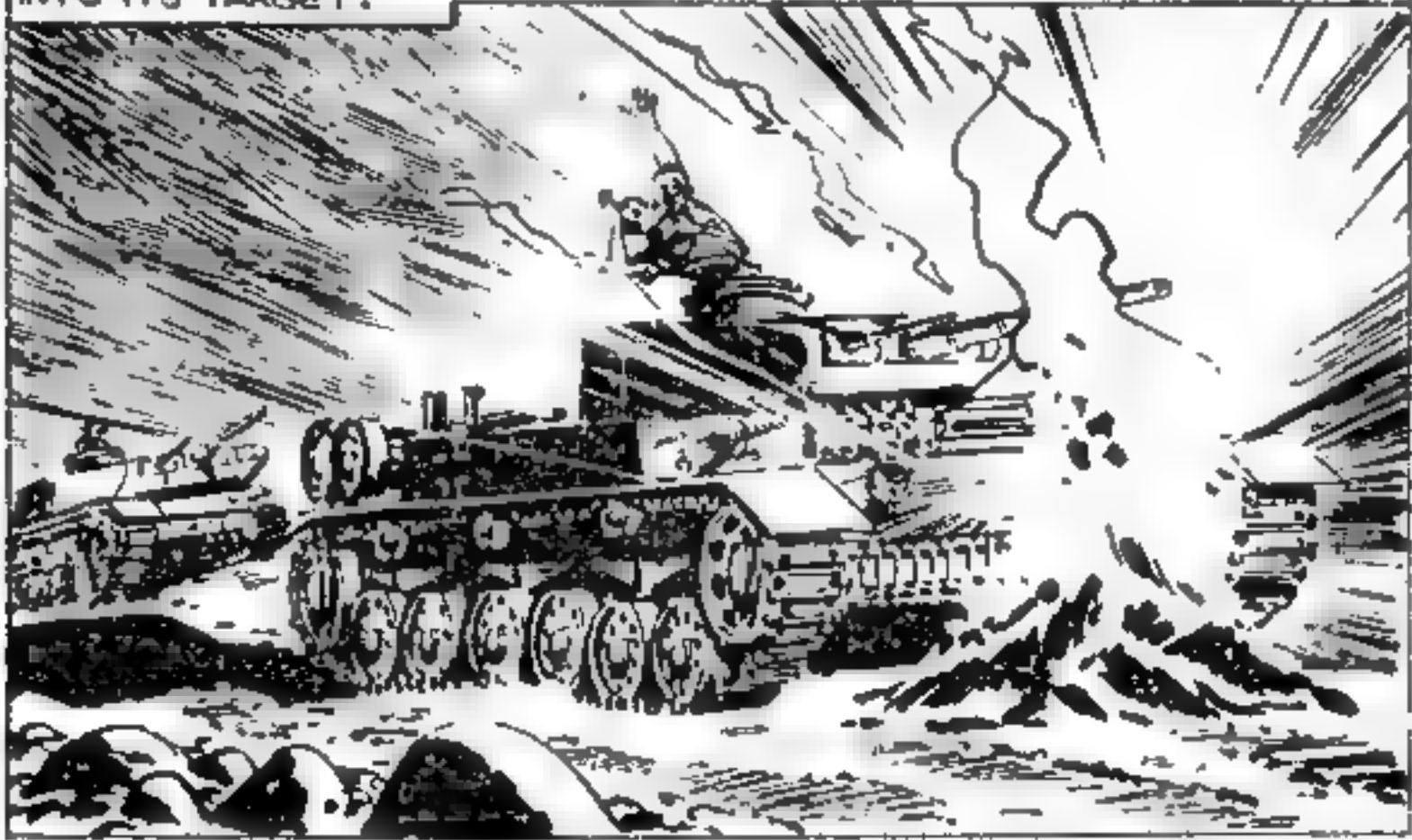
THE LIEUTENANT WAS LUCKY. ALMOST AT ONCE HE MADE CONTACT  
WITH AN AUSTRALIAN DIVISION'S HEADQUARTERS. HE WAS REPORTING TO  
A BRAEG-HAT WHEN DUGGAN YAPPED A WARNING!

THE FIRST  
PANZER'S  
JUST  
CROSSED  
THE SKYLINE  
SR!

WHAT THE BLAZES  
DO YOU EXPECT ME TO  
DO ABOUT IT? BLOW  
KISSES AT IT? I TOLD  
YOU... *FIRE ON YOUR  
OWN INITIATIVE!*



THE DERELICT'S CANNON RIPPED OUT FLAME AND STEEL IN AN EAR-SPLITTING CHALLENGE. A 6-POUND, HIGH VELOCITY SHELL BLUDGEONED INTO ITS TARGET.



IT WAS NO FLUKE, EITHER. A SECOND SHOT WHAMMED INTO TOUGH, ARMOUR-PLATING TO NOTCH UP ANOTHER VICTIM...

TWO OUT OF TWO! YOU CAN CALL ME 'DEAD-SHOT' NOW, MISTER SAVILLE, AND NO KIDDING!

GREAT STUFF, LAD! YOU'VE BLOCKED THE ROAD--FOR THE TIME BEING AT ANY RATE. I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING ELSE THAT'S GOING TO GIVE THE JERRIES A HEADACHE.



59  
GUY REPEATED A MESSAGE THAT HAD JUST BEEN TRANSMITTED TO HIM FROM THE AUSSIE H.Q.

... A CONCENTRATION IS TO BE LAID DOWN BY A BATTERY OF TWENTY-FIVE POUNDERS. I'LL BE DIRECTING THE ARTILLERY'S FIRE ...

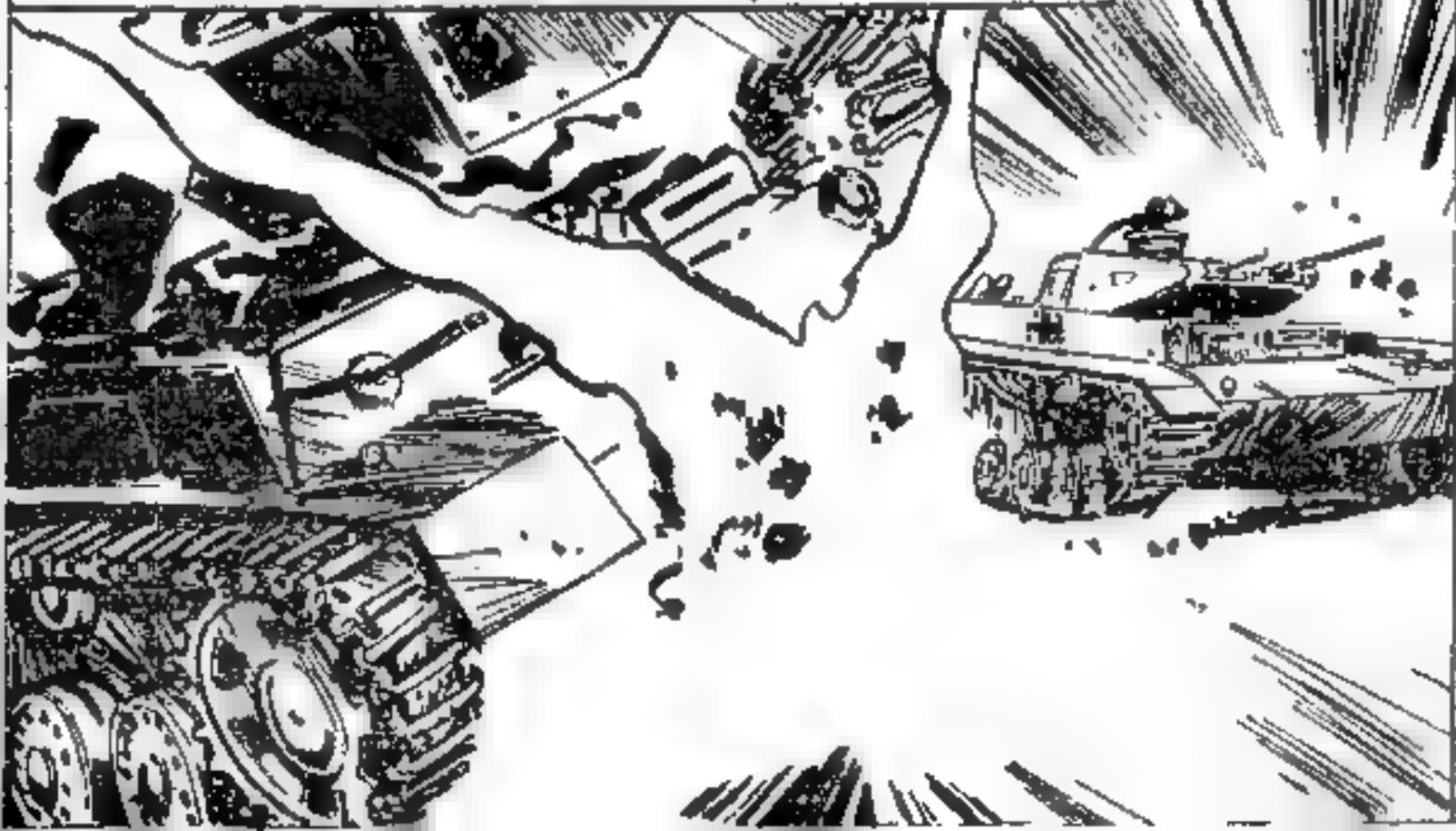


WHILE AUSTRALIAN GUNNERS SENT OVER RANGING SHOTS, THE NAZIS STROVE TO CLEAR THE ROAD. AT LENGTH THEY SUCCEEDED ...

ADVANCE!



THAT WAS WHEN THE AUSSIE BARRAGE DESCENDED... IN A ROARING, PULVERISING DELUGE !



A BARRAGE ZEROED-IN BY CORRECTIONS THAT SAVILLE HAD SENT BACK OVER THE R/T ...

IT'S A MASSACRE, SIR! THAT PANZER-GROUP'S HAD ITS CHIPS!

NOT YET, IT HASN'T, BUSTER! A FAIRISH NUMBER OF THE JERRY TANKS ARE SHOVING THEIR WAY THROUGH!

TO THE EAST, DAN AND MURPHY WERE WATCHING IN AWE ...

GOOD GRIEF! A JERRY SHELL'S HIT THE CRUSADER'S TURRET!

BUT NOT HEAD-ON: IT'S GLANCED OFF! LUMME! WHO'D BE A TANKMAN, THOUGH!

TWO FIGURES CRAWLED FROM THE BRITISH IRONCLAD AND CAME STUMBLING UP THE ROAD .. BUSTER FLEMING AND "DEAD-SHOT" DUGGAN...



AND GUY SAVILLE DID JUST THAT! WITH NAZI TANKS DRAWING NEAR, HE ROUNDED OFF HIS FIRE-DIRECTIONS WITH THE CO-ORDINATES OF THE CRUSADER'S EXACT POSITION!



## Action Front

FOR MINUTES ON END, A FEARFUL HOLOCAUST RAGED.  
IN THE MIDST OF IT THE STACKED MINES WENT UP!



AT LAST THE BOMBARDMENT CEASED. ACRID FUMES SWIRLED UPWARD,  
LIKE THE FOLDS OF SOME HELLISH CURTAIN -- RISING ON A TABLEAU OF  
DEATH AND DESTRUCTION...

ROMMEL WON'T BE SLINGING  
NO RIGHT HOOK AT THE EIGHTH  
ARMY NOW... THANKS TO THE  
BEST OFFICER YOU AND  
I EVER KNEW, BUSTER...



IT WAS CORPORAL DAN SHAW WHO MOVED FIRST. THE OTHERS LOOKED ON IN AMAZEMENT AS HE RACED TOWARDS THE BURNING TANK ...



THE FLAMES WERE LICKING THEIR WAY ROUND THE TURRET OF THE CRUSADER AS DAN RAN UP. THROUGH THEM, HE COULD SEE THE LIMP FIGURE OF GUY BAVILLE ...



DAN PLUNGED THROUGH THE FLAMES, THEIR HUNGRY TONGUES REACHING OUT AS IF TO DEVOUR HIM ...



GENTLY, THE CORPORAL LAID GUY SAVILLE ON THE SAND. THE OTHER MEN RACED UP TO THEM.



AS THEY CLUSTERED ROUND THE LIEUTENANT, AN EAGER SHOUT SPUN THEM ROUND... IT WAS JESMOND! IN THE EXCITEMENT THEY HAD FORGOTTEN THEIR WOUNDED COMRADE...

HEY, YOU LOT! FINE LOT OF MATES YOU ARE! HOW ABOUT COMING UP HERE TO GET ME?

LUMME! I FORGOT ALL ABOUT JESMOND!

ALL RIGHT, CORP, WE'LL GO -- WON'T WE, MURPHY?

SURE! COME ON...

AS THE TWO MEN CLIMBED TO WHERE THEY HAD LEFT JESMOND, GUY SAVILLE SPOKE QUIETLY TO CORPORAL DAN SHAW...

WELL, CORPORAL, WE DID IT, EH?

YOU MEAN YOU DID IT, SIR! MAKES YOU THINK DOESN'T IT? HERE WE'VE BEEN MORE OR LESS FIGHTING EACH OTHER WHEN EVERYBODY ELSE IS FIGHTING THE JERRIES... DAFT, I CALL IT...



SOON THE MEN WERE READY TO GO ON THEIR WAY. MURPHY AND DUGGAN CARRIED THE WOUNDED JESMOND AND CORPORAL DAN SHAW HELPED THE LIMPING LIEUTENANT...



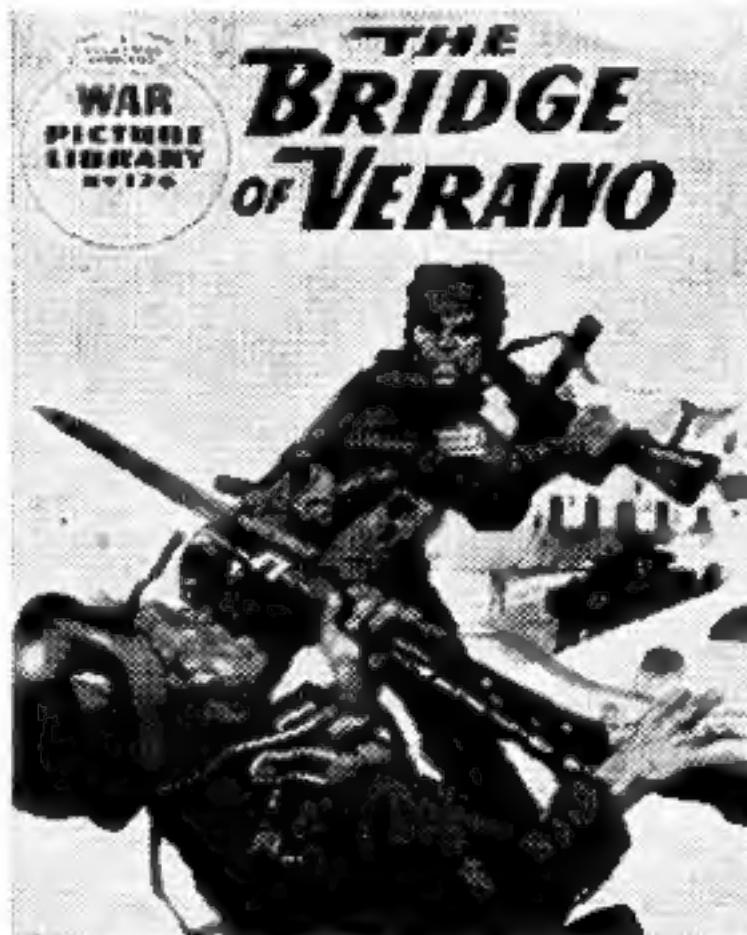
AS THEY SET OFF TOWARDS THEIR OWN LINES AND THE RESCUE TEAM THAT WAS RACING TO MEET THEM, THE SAME THOUGHT WAS IN ALL THEIR MINDS. IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE THEY HAD SETTLED THEIR DIFFERENCES AND NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THEY WERE REALLY UNITED IN FIGHTING THEIR COMMON ENEMY...

**ALSO ON SALE NOW**

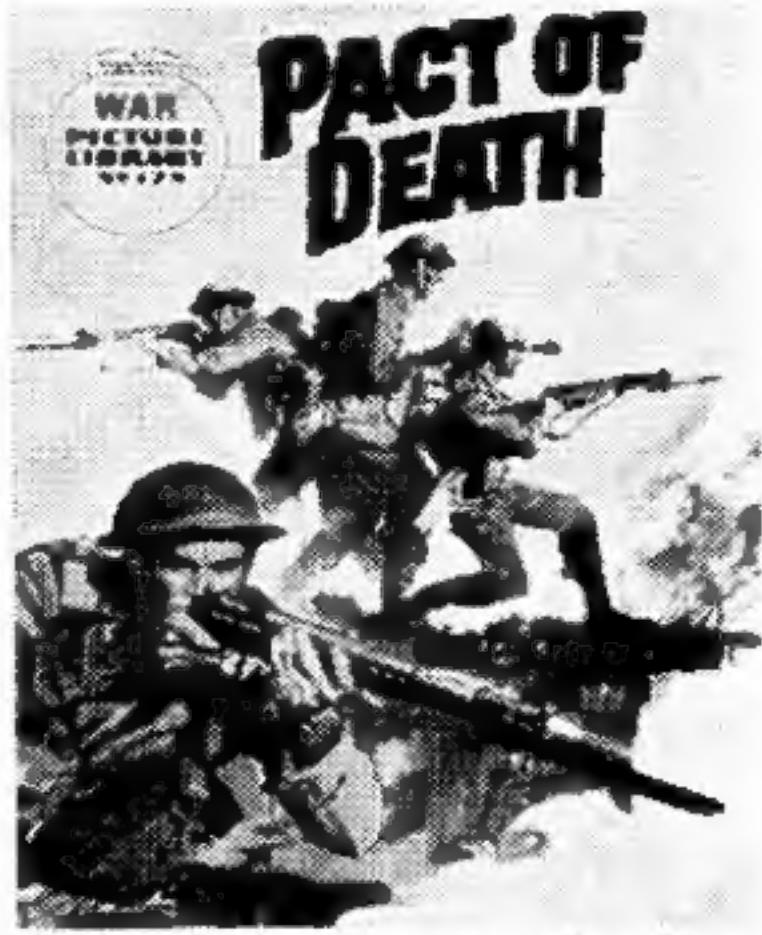
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